MENTORING FIRE OFFICERS: A CALL TO LEADERSHIP

EXECUTIVE PLANNING

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An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program

August 1998

ABSTRACT

Society is currently facing a leadership development crisis due to the rapid pace of change. This crisis is mirrored in the fire service. The responsibility for developing future leaders in the Phoenix Fire Department rests upon the current leaders. Mentorship is a valuable method of preparing leaders for the increasing responsibility of leadership in the rapidly changing environment of fire service.

The purpose of this research was to describe the mentoring relationship, including the various roles and functions of the mentor. In addition, the advantages, disadvantages and pitfalls of mentoring were examined. Descriptive research methods were used to analyze the following questions:

1. What is mentoring?
2. What roles/functions does the mentor fulfill?
3. What are the advantages, disadvantages and pitfalls of a mentoring program for the Phoenix Fire Department?
4. Does informal mentoring fulfill the current needs of the officers of the Phoenix Fire Department?
5. What percentage of command officers is currently involved in a mentoring relationship"
    a. As the mentor
    b. As the protégé

Qualitative research methods (interviews) were used to answer the following questions:

1. What are the critical components of a successful mentoring relationship of command officers in the Phoenix Fire Department?

2. How did the mentoring relationship evolve?

A 14-question survey (Appendix) was developed and interdepartmentally mailed to all command officers and company officers on the current promotional list. A total of 66 surveys were mailed and 39 were returned within the specified time period, resulting in an acceptable return rate of 59%.

Survey results demonstrated that mentoring is a highly valued process for leadership development in the Phoenix Fire Department. However, there was also consensus that mentoring holds unrealized potential for further leadership development. Two thirds of the respondents expressed a desire for training in mentorship.

Results of the interviews revealed the critical components of successful mentor relationships including, genuine interest in the well-being of the mentee, trust, the ability to ask "stupid questions", a significant mutual commitment to the relationship, communication skills, and role modeling.

Additionally, the interviews revealed that successful mentor relationships have begun in a variety of ways. Sometimes the relationship began as boss-subordinate, sometimes as colleagues and occasionally it began with the mentee almost unconsciously mirroring the behaviors of the role model.

Recommendations included a determination of the level of support for the institution of a formal mentoring program from both fire and city management. In order for a formal mentorship program to succeed, support in the form of training, education, mediation, pairing interested parties, and a reward system is reportedly required. If such support is not available, this author recommends voluntary

training and education to enhance the fire officers' abilities to maximize leadership development from their informal mentoring efforts.

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INTRODUCTION

Fire service leaders in the next millennium face unparalleled change and challenges in many areas. One of the most pressing issues faced today is the preparation of the next generation of fire service leaders. According to James Bolt, author and management consultant, there is a leadership development crisis throughout society today. This claim is based upon four quantitative surveys and hundreds of interviews with senior executives of Fortune 500 companies (p. 162). He further states that "leadership is the factor that will ultimately determine our success or failure" (p.173). According to the Phoenix Fire Department Way, "it is an inherent responsibility of current Phoenix Fire Department leaders to develop and instruct a capable cadre of leaders for the future" (p.33). M. Scott Peck, M.D. writes,

> The first duty of the civil manager is to train successors-not a successor, but as many successors as possible as quickly as possible. Use your power to seek and find people with a potential to lead even greater that your own, nurture their potential with all you've got and then get out of the way (pp.260-261).

Therefore, mentorship is a valuable method of preparing leaders for the increasing responsibility of leadership in the rapidly changing environment of fire service.

The purpose of this research was to describe the mentoring relationship, including the various roles and functions of the mentor. In addition, the advantages, disadvantages and pitfalls of the mentoring process as it relates to the fire service were also examined. This information may serve as the foundation for training in

mentor/protégé relationships for the Phoenix Fire Department. Descriptive research methods were used to analyze the following questions:

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2. What roles/functions does the mentor fulfill?
3. What are the advantages, disadvantages and pitfalls of a mentoring program for the Phoenix Fire Department?
4. Does informal mentoring fulfill the current needs of the officers of the Phoenix Fire Department?
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BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

This paper represents the research and data development stage of officer development through mentorship as examined in the course Executive Planning (National Fire Academy, Executive Fire Officer Program). Specifically, this paper will examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) regarding the possibility of adopting a mentoring program as listed on page SM 4-23 in the Student Manual for Executive Planning.

It is this author's contention, based on twenty year's experience in the fire service that coaching and mentoring occur naturally until the rank of captain or first level supervisor is reached. Mentoring creates a tremendous strength within the fire service that supports the rapid development of young members. For example, virtually every competent senior firefighter, paramedic, engineer and captain is happy, even eager to share with the less experienced member of the crew. This happens for a variety of reasons. First, the communal living in the fire station provides ample opportunity for mentoring. These relationships develop naturally, by virtue of spending one third of their lives together. Second, the nature of emergency services builds strong bonds. Fighting fire and saving lives requires a team of qualified individuals, and a spirit of camaraderie that develops easily when these intense experiences are shared. Few, if any, other professionals depend to such an extent on the other members of their team or crew. Knowing that one's life may depend upon the abilities of another crew member is reason enough to try to develop the less experienced members of the team. Third, the nature

of the people who chose to work in the helping professions of emergency services are motivated to help and make a difference in the lives of others, including their crews.

It is common to be informally mentored in the fire service until one reaches the rank of captain. At this point, mentoring frequently stops, because chief officers do not live in the same quarters and respond on the same calls in the same apparatus as those with lower rank. Chief officers do not normally develop as close and nurturing relationships with their captains, as captains do with their crews. Chief officers are responsible for larger numbers of members spread out over greater physical distance.

In the Phoenix Fire Department (PFD), the need for a mentoring program was identified in the early 1990s due to a shortage of candidates testing for command officer positions. In order to address this issue, command officers were asked to select three captains they would be willing to mentor. The command officer then called the captains to determine if they were interested in promotion to battalion chief (BC). If the captains expressed an interest, the command officer offered to mentor him/her. There were no guidelines or training provided to the mentors or protégés about roles, functions, or expectations. Due to the lack of training and guidelines, few if any mentor relationship developed as a result of this effort. While this approach may not fit the definition of mentorship according to the literature, the number of candidates taking the BC promotional exam rose to acceptable levels. It was assumed that this pairing of officers was responsible for the increased numbers of candidates taking the chief test.

The next step taken by PFD toward establishing a mentorship program was to upgrade the field incident technician (FIT) position, which assists the BC in the

performance of duties. Prior to the summer of 1997, FIT positions were filled by firefighters or engineers who drove the BC command vehicle and assisted as required both on the emergency scene as well as with the daily managerial and leadership duties. The FIT job description was changed to allow only captains with the intention to test for the BC position to hold a FIT position. This provides a situation favorable to mentoring, including team work, spending one third of their lives together and focusing on a common goal. However, there still have been no training or guidelines given to the prospective mentors or protégés.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Perspective of Mentoring

The term mentor is derived from Greek mythology, circa 800 BC. Mentor was the name of the faithful companion of Odysseus, King of Ithaca. Odysseus, in preparation to leaving for the Trojan Wars, instructed Mentor to take charge of the royal household in his absence. One of Mentor's critical roles was to prepare the king's son, Telemachus to ascend the throne. Mentor assumed the roles of father figure, teacher, role model, counselor, advisor, and encourager in the preparation of Telemachus for his royal duties as future king. "Mentors are leaders who engage in deliberate actions aimed at promoting learning; 'leader,' 'manager,' or 'coach' would serve as well" (Bell, p. xvii).

The term "protégé" comes from the French verb, "proteger", meaning to protect, referring to the recipient of mentor interest. Historically, mentoring has involved protecting and developing the protégé (Carruthers). Some authors in the human resource development field have recently begun to use the term "mentee" instead of "protégé". "Mentee" connotes more a partnership than a relationship of protection. Bell claims that "associate," "subordinate," "colleague," "partner," or "follower" are interchangeable with "protégé" (p.xvii). This author has been advised by fire service managers that there will likely be some resistance in the fire service to the term "protégé," so this paper will use the term "mentee."

It is unlikely that one could find an example of the classical mentor relationship in modern organizations. The needs have changed with the situations being faced, but mentor-mentee dyads still form to meet the needs of the wiser, more experienced mentor and the younger, aspiring mentee. Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary defines mentor as "an experienced and trusted friend and advisor" (p. 625). Phillips-Jones defines mentors as influential people who significantly help one reach his major life goals. She also characterizes the distinction between primary and secondary mentors by the development of an emotional bond. Nancy Grant, Ph.D. and David Hoover, Ph.D. write that

> mentoring is an activity that pairs experienced officers with new or inexperienced officers to facilitate their career growth, enhance officer performance, and stimulate a greater understanding of the organization in addition to teaching leadership and administrative skills. The role of the mentor is to motivate and encourage the mentee to reach full potential (p. 175).

When to Mentor

The greatest need for mentoring develops as individuals move into a new position. New responsibilities create doubts concerning his/her ability to perform. According to "Charles Garfield, author of Peak Performance, and others who have studied this topic, doubt is one of the most powerful impediments to human performance," (p. 286, Bornstein and Smith). Another frequent concern is the extent to which one will conform or conflict with expectations and norms at higher levels of management. As these expectations are encountered, the young manager struggles with a change of identity. Resistance or confusion regarding his/her evolving self-concept prohibits the development of positive relationships. Therefore, it is best to have the mentor relationship already in place prior to placement of the new manager (Kram, 1988).

According to Linda Hill, consultant, author and course head of Harvard Business School, stress is a significant factor in the lives of managers in today's organizations.

> Even the most experienced (managers) often report feelings of overload, conflict, ambiguity and isolation. New managers are surprised by the "burdens of leadership," having to make decisions that affect peoples' lives in profound ways, particularly when they are unsure about what the right answer is in a given situation. As one manager put it, "I never knew a promotion could be so painful." New managers have to learn how to manage themselves and their emotions (p. 34).

Hill goes on to write, "The myriad of challenges encountered when one becomes a manager are difficult to shoulder alone. Unfortunately, new managers can be reluctant to ask for help; it doesn't fit their conception of the boss as expert." (p.35)

> Many new managers report that they have very few safe places to go for help; many sheepishly describe actively avoiding their superiors... Consequently, most organizations miss the unique opportunity to positively influence the leadership philosophies and styles of their new managers (Hill, pp. 36-37).

Mentoring Skills

The needs and communication skills of both parties affect the range of roles of the mentor. Skills, which enhance the number of roles possible, include effective listening, giving and receiving feedback, managing conflict, disagreement, collaboration and competition. Two other critical elements for success of a mentor, according to Denis Bramblette are a strong sense of self-confidence and "patience with what might seem like protracted growth" of the protégé (p.47). Building trust and rapport are prerequisites for being effective in the roles of mentorship. Best selling author and consultant, Chip Bell concurs, "mentoring partnerships work only when there is trust. While trust is a key component of in all healthy relationships, it is especially critical in relationships where there is an unequal distribution of power" (p.78). Trust is based on credibility. Bornstein and Smith (pps. 283-284) have developed six criteria of credibility they call the Six C's of Leadership Credibility:

1. Conviction: the passion and commitment the person demonstrates toward his or her vision.

2. Character: consistent demonstration of integrity, honesty, respect and trust.
3. Care: demonstration of concern for the personal and professional well being of others.
4. Courage: willingness to stand up for one's beliefs, challenge others, admit mistakes, and change one's own behavior when necessary.
5. Composure: consistent display of appropriate emotional reactions, particularly in tough or crisis situations.
6. Competence: proficiency in hard skills, such as technical, functional, and content expertise skills, and soft skills, such as interpersonal, communication, team, and organizational skills.

The Roles of the Mentor

The roles and functions of the mentor vary according to the relationship, the needs of the mentee and the mentor, the interpersonal skills of both parties, the culture of the organization and time constraints. For example, if the relationship is one of direct supervision of a young manager, the roles of the mentor could include coaching, teaching, counseling, explaining the values, customs and norms, as well as acceptance and encouragement. Friendship frequently develops as the pair spends time together. If, however, physical distance or levels of management separate the dyad, a lack of frequent contact may prohibit important development of these roles. If the mentee has been in management for a number of years, he/she may not require all of these roles to be filled. In these situations, the mentor may undertake the role of sponsorship.

Initially, many of the roles of the mentor may seem outside the boundaries of traditional, hierarchical boss-subordinate relationships. However, they are critical to preparing inexperienced managers for the increasing responsibilities of leadership and management. In fact, Levinson et al. (1978) suggest that a mentor relationship is the most important relationship of young adulthood.

Next, a more detailed description of the roles of the mentor, as reported by Kathy Kram (1988), Chip Bell (1996) and others will be examined.

Sponsor: Without sponsorship, a member is likely to be overlooked regardless of competence. Sponsorship occurs both in formal settings and informal conversation. To rely on only one manager for sponsorship is risky. If the sponsor leaves the organization or loses credibility, the mentee's career may suffer. Single person sponsorship also brings up questions of merit and favoritism. When this happens, it is best for the mentee to work with other managers for a greater level of exposure.

Inquisitor: Truly great mentors subscribe to the Socratic method of teaching through effective questioning which "brings insight, fuels curiosity and cultivates wisdom" (Bell, p.68). Bell further points out that the greatest mentors of history, including Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Mohammed, Confucius and Lao-Tse used thought-provoking questions to stimulate the "aha experience" in the their followers (p. 75).

Fortune 500 CEOs were surveyed about their experience with mentors. "When asked what made the mentors so effective, the most common response was that they asked great questions" (Bell, p.75).

Great Listeners: "Ask fifty people who had great mentors what attribute they found most crucial and forty nine will probably mention their mentor's listening" (Bell, p. 88). "Dramatic listening is not just a rendezvous of brains; it is a uniting, a linkage, a partnership. Like all human connections, it requires constant effort and commitment" (Bell, p.90). "Ironically, in a role whose purpose is to provide guidance, the cardinal rule is to listen more than you talk. Sometimes the best thing to help people work through their problems and move on is an empathetic sounding board to bounce feelings off of" (Results, p.2).

Exposure and Visibility: Exposure and visibility are critical to establishing a solid reputation. Others need to become aware of the mentee's talent to facilitate continued success. The mentee also needs to be exposed to opportunities for transfer and advancement that he/she may not be aware of.

Coaching: The role of the coach is to suggest specific strategies for accomplishing work, achieving recognition and goals. The coach also critiques the performance of the mentee in order to help him/her improve. Experts recommend that every manager assume the role of coach with each of his/her directly reporting subordinates. It involves discussing mutual expectations and joint problem solving. The coach provides a context of understanding upon which the mentee can base future decisions. Coaching frequently involves discussions of players, politics, desirable experiences and relationships to be developed.

Without coaching, the member interested in advancement is handicapped by a lack of information and advice. "Given the complexities of their new responsibilities and

all that they have to learn, new managers, no matter how gifted, still need coaching" (Hill, p.36). According to several experts, the most important contribution that a mentor can give is coaching to avoid high-profile, catastrophic failure. The mentor may also provide information regarding the direction of the organization, the mission, vision and goals.

Protection: Protection involves reducing unnecessary risks a young manager may be facing. It may include taking credit and blame in controversial situations where the mentee is not likely to have success. At times, protection includes running interference. In contrast, protection can be overdone. If used excessively, it may smother the mentee by inhibiting growth and independence.

Challenging Assignments: Challenging assignments prepare the mentee for positions of greater responsibility and authority, by equipping him/her with the skills necessary to take advantage of opportunities. The mentee must be prepared to perform well on a difficult task in order to advance. "Among the most powerful learning experiences are stretch assignments, giving people goals that are a little beyond what they're capable of doing." (Hill p. 35). "Career theorist, David Thomas has shown that people who do not have access to stretch (challenging) assignments, or do not establish developmental relationships will actually lose skills over time." (Hill p. 36).

Role Model: Role modeling is one of the most common roles of the mentor. Attitudes, values, behavior and frame of reference are demonstrated and shared with the mentee. The mentee will incorporate many of these, thereby shaping his/her style, values and professional identity. Role modeling succeeds when a bond of trust is created between

the mentor and the mentee. In turn, the mentee adopts successful traits of the mentor. In addition, trust is critical to the development of this relationship.

Counseling: Counseling helps the mentee resolve personal concerns and internal conflict, thereby minimizing his/her alienation and enhancing self-worth. The mentee can speak in confidence about sensitive issues, such as balancing family and work commitments. Another common concern of young managers is the perception that one must compromise personal values, integrity and independence in order to climb the promotional ladder. While these conflicts may not be resolved in a session or two, the support of empathetic listening of the mentor enable the mentee to tolerate the ambivalence and ambiguity and address it. Without such a mentor, the young manager may withdraw and hide the conflict that can interfere with his/her quality of life, quality of work, and willingness to further commit to the organization. Career planning is another aspect of the counseling role of the mentor. For example, fire service mentors might suggest transferring to a staff position in training or dispatch to enhance skill development of the mentee.

Acceptance and Affirmation: The function of acceptance and affirmation describes a benefit to both parties in a mentor relationship. The mentor provides support, encouragement, positive feedback and nurturing to the mentee. In order for the relationship to grow, the mentee must demonstrate respect, admiration, and support for the wisdom and experience offered. This role reduces the fear associated with risk taking. It minimizes the fear of failure which otherwise could hold the mentee back.

"The focus of the mentor is to offer an unconditional, faithful acceptance of the protégé" (Bell, p. 7).

"Great mentors are not only devoted fans of their proteges, they are loyal fans of the dream of what the protégé can become with their guidance" (Bell, p.8). Mentors are committed to the success of the mentees and work toward the development of their potential.

Friendship: Friendship is a social lubricant that allows escape from the pressure of work. Because the mentor is often an authority figure, the relationship allows the mentee to be more comfortable when dealing with authority figures. The mentor will eventually serve as a consultant-friend as a natural progression of this close working relationship. Additionally, mentor-friendships keep the mentor in touch and able to relate with the younger generation of up and coming fire service leaders. Friendship provides a sense of vitality to the mentor, and adds spontaneity and mutual enjoyment to the work environment.

Although there are many possible roles and functions available to a mentor, no one can fulfill all these roles for the mentee. Linda Hill (p.37) dispels the "perfect mentor" myth and gives sound advice to the mentee.

> Perfect mentors are rarely found; mentors are neither omnipresent nor omnipotent...Rather than seeking perfect mentors, new managers should learn to become "perfect protégés", so that people will want to mentor them. The perfect protege is smart enough to know what she doesn't know, is willing to disclose information that will allow others to help her, and is open to receiving feedback. She looks not only to a single mentor for guidance but has a diverse personal board of directors to help her learn (Hill, P. 37).

Benefits to mentor, mentee and organization

Possible benefits to the mentor:

- Heightened satisfaction and integrity from passing on knowledge and experience
- Sense of competence
- Sense of self-worth is increased
- Personal expression in the next generation of managers (legacy)
- Respect for capabilities
- If the protégé is successful, credibility is enhanced, viewed as having good judgment
- Greater power
- Financial reward
- Additional resource for professional assistance on work projects
- Refined interpersonal skills
- Enhanced status in the organization
- Creative input
- Avoidance of burnout
- Maintenance of motivation

Possible benefits to the mentee

- Heightened confidence
- Increased self-worth
- Increased opportunities for advancement
- Costly mistakes avoided
- Fuller sense of authority

- Reflective power
- Productivity and ratings higher than for non-mentees
- Higher pay
- Increased pleasure in work activities
- Greater career satisfaction
- Greater knowledge in technical and organizational aspects of the business
- Mentees achieve executive level two years before those not involved in a mentor program (American Society for Training and Development, 1986)
- The typically high expectations of the mentor tend to raise the level of performance of the mentee

Possible benefits to the organization:

- Significant tendency of the mentee to acquire the traits of discipline and work ethic from the mentor
- Increased teamwork and performance planning
- Cost effective experiential learning not available in classroom (The American Society for Training and Development reports that an average training of a new employee costs approximately $150,000, while investing in mentoring training averages only $500 per year. Shaw, pp. E10-11)
- Serves as a system of checks and balances on new managers (Copeland)
- Improved succession planning
- Increased organizational communication and understanding
- Improved recruitment efforts (for hire and promotion)

- Improved retention of intellectual capital

Possible Pitfalls of Mentorship Programs

Due to the wide range of responsibilities and skills necessary to mentor, not every senior officer will be able or willing to invest the time and effort to be successful, effective mentors. Rather than institute required involvement in a mentoring program, it should be voluntary to prevent resentment on the part of unwilling participants (Kram, 1988).

Education should be provided so members can learn about mentor functions, career development and have an opportunity to develop the interpersonal skills to be successful in mentoring relationships.

There are inherent problems with formally structured, assigned relationships. Successful mentor relationships must evolve much like other successful relationships involving the commitment/investment of time, energy and effort (Kram, 1980). Why would one be willing to invest in a mentee that he/she was not able to choose on the basis of trust? Why would a mentee put in the necessary effort and time to learn from an assigned mentor that he/she does not know or trust? In American society, personal choice is paramount. Research indicates that engineering mentoring relationships is not as effective as mentor relationships that evolve at the choosing of the individuals (Levinson, et al., 1978; Kram, 1980).

Top management's support is vital to developing human resources through mentoring. Tangible support of a mentor program is demonstrated in various ways. For example, education, skill training and a reward system that encourages mentoring

alliances are critical to the long-term success of a formal mentor program. Research supports that a reward system for mentoring behavior results in more mentoring efforts and more talented managers. Without a tangible reward system as a component of a formal mentorship program, frustration will usually overcome even those who were initially enthusiastic (Kram, 1988).

Mentors need to evaluate situations of the mentee and help develop common sense approaches. However, sometimes mentors rush in to solve the mentee's problem when he/she would be better served by being allowed to grapple with the situation and in some cases make mistakes. In other cases, mentors push their advice when the mentee simply needs a sounding board and a few well-directed questions to come up with solutions to which they agree. In addition, occasionally, an unhealthy dependence may be fostered in the mentee, instead of the relationship transforming to interdependence.

In some cases, the location and design of work can interfere with building mentoring relationships. If the jobs are structured so that interaction between mentor and mentee is not promoted, then the effort required to build those relationships is significantly increased.

There can be an over-commitment on the part of the mentor of over investing personal time. In some cases, lunch hours are taken up with the mentee. In other cases, non-work time is committed, which, if not managed, can result in infringement on the mentor's family time. Ground rules need to be negotiated in order to meet the needs of both parties.

Gifted young managers find mentors more easily that less gifted or disadvantaged managers. This is especially true of those with strong people skills.

Jealousy is also a possible pitfall regarding mentoring. It is possible that peers of mentors and mentees will become jealous when their colleagues are professionally recognized or reap other benefits of the mentor relationship. Although rare, some mentors have become jealous and prevented the outstanding work of a mentee from receiving just acclaim. In addition, spousal jealously can develop, especially when mentoring involves cross-sex relationships.

While there is risk associated with any relationship, there are commensurate benefits also. By openly examining and discussing the risks and possible negative aspects of mentoring, these pitfalls may be avoided.

Mentoring outside the fire service.

Mentoring has long been an accepted practice in the private sector as evidenced by a survey over a decade ago. Of the 1,200 top managers of the largest U.S. corporations that were questioned about their mentor relationships, over two-thirds had been mentored (Zey, 1988). In another study, Fortune 500 CEOs were asked what factors had contributed to their success. Many listed effective mentors as a key factor (Bell, 1996).

Women are discovering the advantages of being mentored in order to move up in arenas that have traditionally been male-dominated. A 1996 survey found that 91% of female executives had been mentored (Shaw, 1998).

Several large corporations and governmental organizations have implemented formal mentoring programs because the naturally occurring informal mentoring was not developing the necessary numbers of mentors and mentees to meet the needs of the organization. For example, AT&T, Johnson and Johnson, Merill Lynch, Federal Express, the Internal Revenue Service and the US Army have begun formal mentoring programs (Caldwell and Carter, 1993).

These organizations experienced with mentor programs have discovered that it is ineffective to leave the development of mentor-mentee relationships to chance even in structured mentor programs. Training is required, as productive mentoring does not come natural to many employees. Learning productive mentoring behaviors is critical to establish and enrich mentoring relationships. Ongoing training through the mentoring process has proven helpful in the long-term success of the programs (Caldwell and Carter, p. 84).

Mentoring programs have a long and successful history in the field of education, involving teachers, principals and students. In fact, many states, including New York, Ohio and New Jersey have mandated mentoring programs to address the needs of both beginning and experienced teachers (Blank & Sindelar, 1992).

In Singapore, the educational system recently invested heavily in the mentoring of its teachers. Extensive education, training in mentoring skills and a reward system were put in place. The results, in terms of increased productivity and learning on the part of students, were nothing short of outstanding. As a result, mentoring is considered

a powerful tool for improvement, and in the Singapore Educational System, worth the considerable investment (Caldwell and Carter, p. 90).

The medical field in the United States has used mentoring in a variety of forms for many years. The form of mentoring used in medicine, which is most familiar to the fire service, is that of preceptor. Paramedics and other medical professionals are precepted or mentored through their responsibilities by others with more experience or education. Due to the demands of rapid change of recent years, the Royal Hobart Hospital of Tasmania, Australia adopted a preceptor program to orient its new employees. None of the staff had previous experience with preceptorship. The program was considered quite successful as 80% of preceptors and preceptees reported they had benefited from the experience. Additionally, skill deficiencies were identified, for example, 50% of the preceptors reported that they lacked adequate conflict resolution skills and 33% lacked sufficient counseling and feedback skills. Preceptors consistently reported an increase in self esteem and job satisfaction (Caldwell and Carter, pp. 90-95).

The Power Brewing Company of Queensland, Australia began a mentoring program shortly after recruiting its first employees. Mentoring has reportedly developed and maintained a productive work culture that has enabled the company to remain adaptable to change. Power's mentor program includes formal in-house training, on the job instructor experience, refresher sessions, formal external advanced training in instructional techniques, task analysis, communication skills, problem solving and

decision making skills. Power's managers believe this significant investment in their employees is money well spent.

> In the case of Power Brewing we have obtained benefits exceeding the costs in the adoption of such a system. Briefly, and in summary, these are:
> 1 more effective, efficient and productive dialogue, participation and cooperation among employees;
> 2 increased productivity;
> 3 employees who display improved initiative, problem solving and decision-making;
> 4 a more flexible, competent and committed workforce (Slipais, p. 140).

Although the author could find no direct information on the mentor program at Intel, one can infer that it is quite active and effective from the following story. Jeffrey Miller, current president and CEO of Documentum Inc., shares a valuable lesson for preventing insanity, frustration and burnout that he learned from one of his mentors at Intel. "Each year as I moved up through the organization, I noticed I was working one hour longer. I realized that if I ever became a vice president I'd never get home" (pp. 76-80). His mentor explained the need to find a sustainable pace for long term success. Miller shares this advice with his mentees along with the need to develop "laserlike focus on their priorities." Miller's leadership advice seems to be working, Documentum has compounded an annual growth rate of 8,800% since 1993.

Mentoring in the fire service.

> Senior fire officers have a vested interest in the careers of junior officers and prospective officer candidates. As the fire service transcends the traditional model toward one that responds to the constantly changing needs of the community, so too must the department's leadership. The question is how can this be accomplished given the paramilitary

> structure of the organization and the inherent staffing restraints placed on it by such a system? One effective method is a mentoring program (Grant & Hoover, p. 176).

In 1986, the San Jose Fire Department implemented a one-year pilot mentor program. Two captains and three firefighters were chosen based on application, interview, work history and career goals. These fire mentees were given special projects, allowed to work in various areas within the department and included in staff meetings. According to Assistant Chief Lejames Suess, "the success of the project exceeded the expectations of the staff." He proposes that the pilot mentor program "increased the productivity and effectiveness of the department while giving interns added opportunities to develop skills important and necessary for advancement in today's fire service" (p. 44).

Based on the literature review, few formal mentor programs have been implemented for fire service officers, and even fewer have published results. Similar to other trends of human resource development, like educational prerequisites to promotion, the fire service lags behind other professions. However, others have researched mentor relationships in the fire service. In a 1991 study of California fire chiefs, 63% had utilized mentors during their careers; most had maintained relationships with two to three mentors. A full 28% reported that a mentor had an extraordinary influence on their career, while 56% reported a substantial influence (Meston, 1991). Another study, completed in 1997, examined a cross-section of command officers attending classes at the National Fire Academy. Results indicate that 98% of the

respondents expressed a willingness to mentor someone else and 100% of the respondents being mentored reported that it had a positive influence on their careers (Austin, 1997).

Advice to prospective mentors and mentees

"Find a mentor. You're never too old to be a protégé, especially when you want to improve people skills, political skills or simply your facility with certain tasks. There are tricks and shortcuts in every business and the stars know them" (A helping hand, p.1).

Prospective mentees should not expect that one mentor can fulfill all of the functions described above. Those expectations are unrealistic and set the mentee up for disappointment. It is more realistic to participate in a variety of relationships that provide some mentoring functions.

Grant and Hoover explain the process of mentor selection with advice to choose carefully. First, one should define goals and objectives to be accomplished through the mentoring process. This will help select the appropriate mentor. It is important to find someone with the skills that are desired in addition to the people skills to teach them. The prospective mentor must also have the time to devote to the mentoring process and be willing to commit the necessary time and effort to the mentee (1994).

According to Ron Willingham, the coaching/mentoring process has five steps:

1. Ask protégés about goals, plans to accomplish them and what is holding them back.

2. Listen carefully, without judgement and paraphrase to insure understanding.
3. Suggest an action to help overcome an obstacle, but keep the responsibility on their shoulders. Facilitate them discovering their own answers through asking stimulating questions as much as possible.
4. Praise specific behaviors. Point out talents, attitudes and abilities that will help them reach their goals. Express belief in them.
5. Challenge them to become their best, achieve their potential and ask for a commitment to specific results and time frames.

Recommended training includes, problem solving, decision-making, assertion skills, delegation, negotiation skills, listening skills, and management/supervisory skills (Slipais, 1993).

PROCEDURES

Definition of terms

Mentor is a term used to describe a leader who engages in deliberate actions aimed at promoting learning; leader, manager and coach are frequently used as synonyms. "Not all mentors are supervisors, but all effective supervisors are mentors" (Bell, p. 6).

Protégé refers to the primary beneficiary of the mentoring effort; mentee, associate, colleague, partner, preceptor or follower can also be used.

Research Methodology

The desired outcome of this research was to determine the value of mentoring fire officers in the Phoenix Fire Department. Specifically, desired outcomes included, measuring the quantity and quality of mentor experiences of fire officers, determining the desire for mentor training as well as assessing the value placed on mentoring to develop leadership abilities. Additional desired outcomes included determining the source of the officers' knowledge of mentoring and identifing critical elements of extremely successful mentor relationships between fire officers.

Instrumentation

A fourteen-question survey (Appendix) was developed and interdepartmentally mailed to all command officers and company officers on the current command officer promotional list. A total of 66 surveys were sent out and 39 were returned within the specified time period, resulting in an acceptable return rate of 59%. This survey answered most of the quantitative portion of this research.

The last question of the survey provided opportunity for the respondents to volunteer to be interviewed regarding mentor experiences in the fire service. The individual interviews provided an in depth evaluation to determine specific qualities of successful mentor relationships in the fire service. The information sought included, how the relationship was formed, in addition to what activities, roles and qualities of the mentor caused such a significant impact on the career of the mentee. Respondents were chosen for an interview based on the impact mentoring has had on their careers. Nine command officers were chosen for interviews, based on the reported quality of mentoring experiences and their willingness to be interviewed.

Assumptions and Limitations

It was assumed that all respondents would be honest in their responses to the survey, since anonymity was an option if the respondent did not volunteer for an interview.

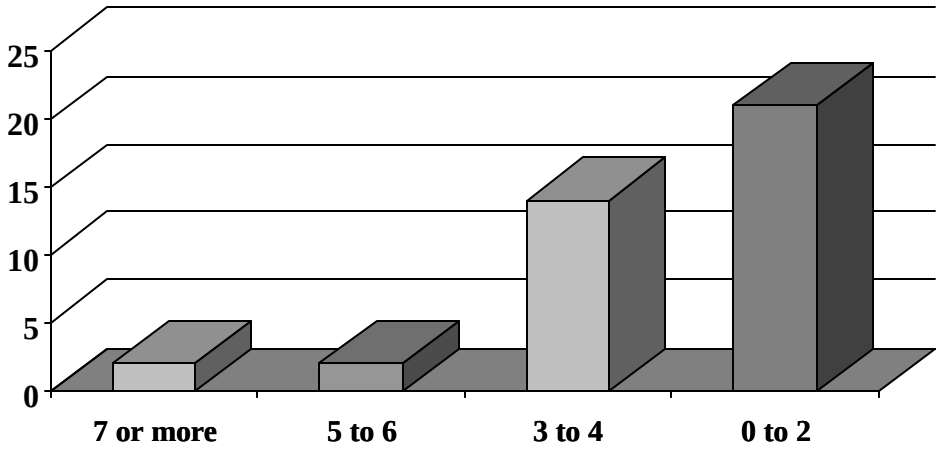
Time limited this research. More time would have provided follow up opportunities to achieve a higher rate of return on the surveys. Additional time would have allowed the study to expand to fire command officers across the state instead of Phoenix only.

Results

Of the 39 command officers who returned the survey, the following is a breakdown of how each question was answered.

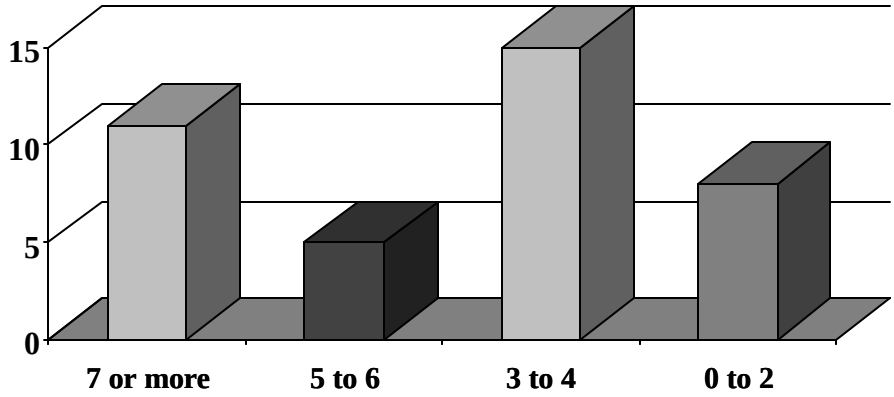
1. Since becoming a fire officer, have you been mentored by:

7 or more mentors	2	=	5%
5 to 6 mentors	2	=	5%
3 to 4 mentors	14	=	36%
0 to 2 mentors	21	=	54%



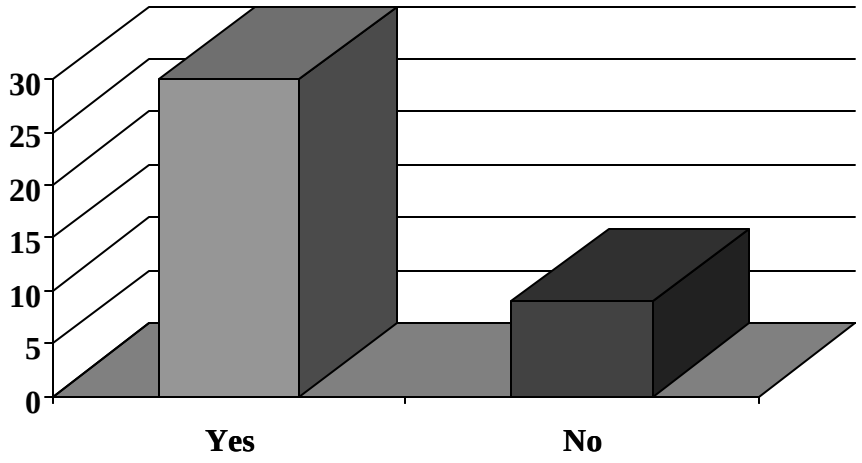
2. Since becoming an officer, have you mentored:

7 or more officers	11	=	28%
5 to 6 officers	5	=	13%
3 to 4 officers	15	=	38%
0 to 2 officers	8	=	21%



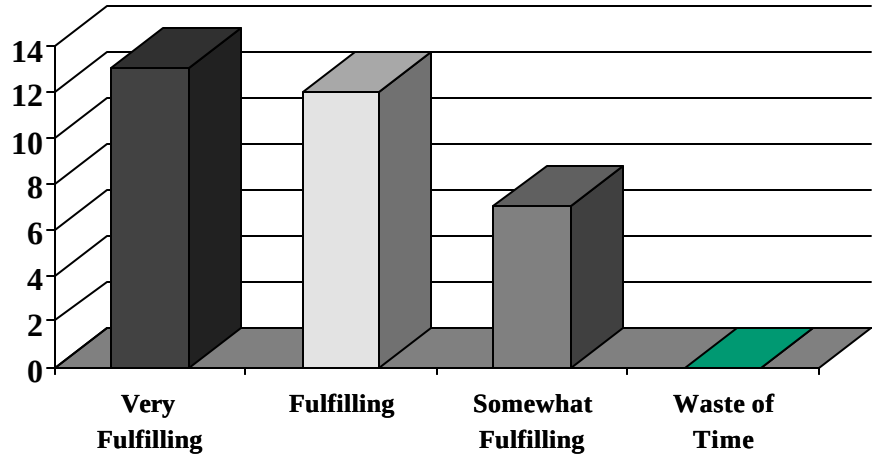
3. Are you currently mentoring another fire officer?

Yes	30	=	77%
No	9	=	23%



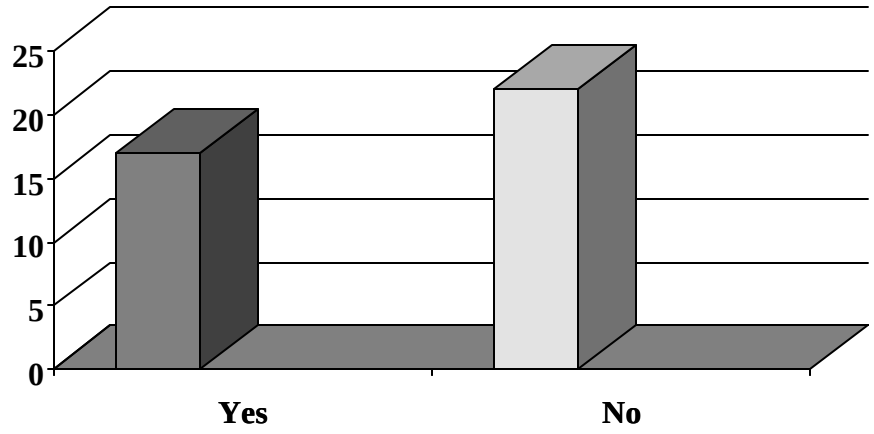
4. If you are currently mentoring another fire officer, how rewarding is the relationship?

Very fulfilling	13	=	40%
Fulfilling	12	=	38%
Somewhat fulfilling	7	=	22%
Waste of time	0		



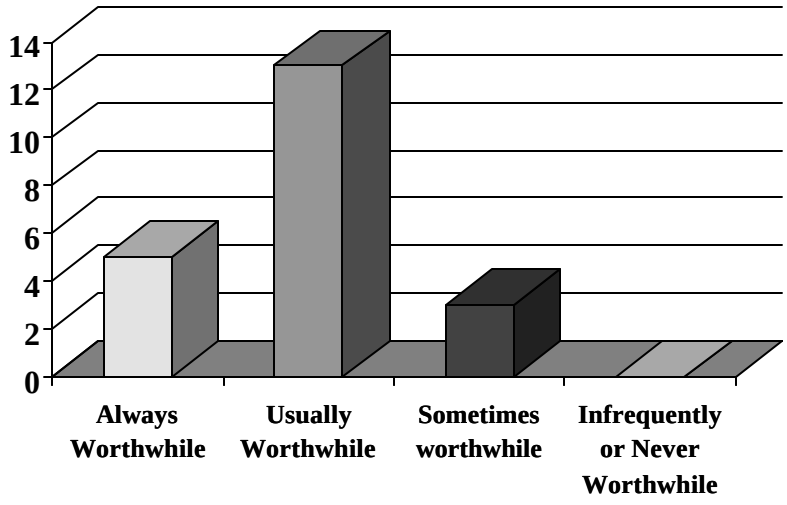
5. Are you currently being mentored by another fire officer?

Yes	17	=	44%
No	22	=	56%



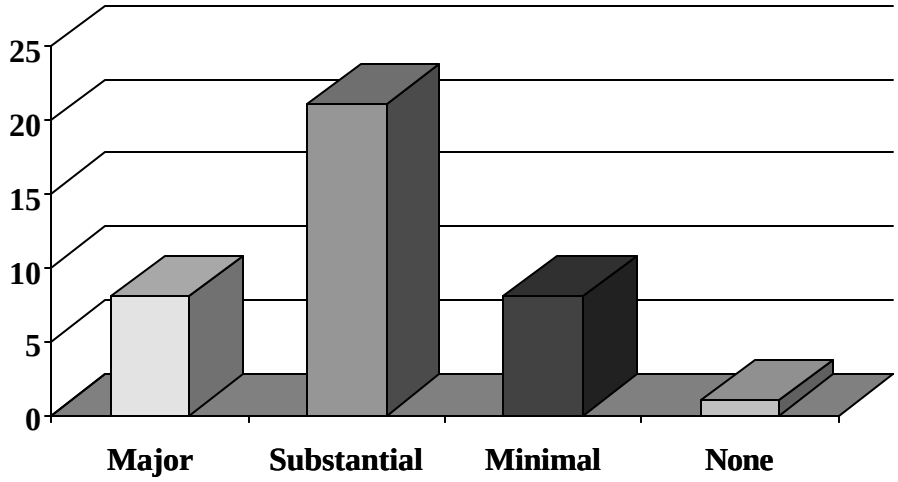
6. If you are currently being mentored, does the relationship meet your needs?

Always worthwhile	5	=	24%
Usually worthwhile	13	=	62%
Sometimes worthwhile	3	=	14%
Infrequently	0		



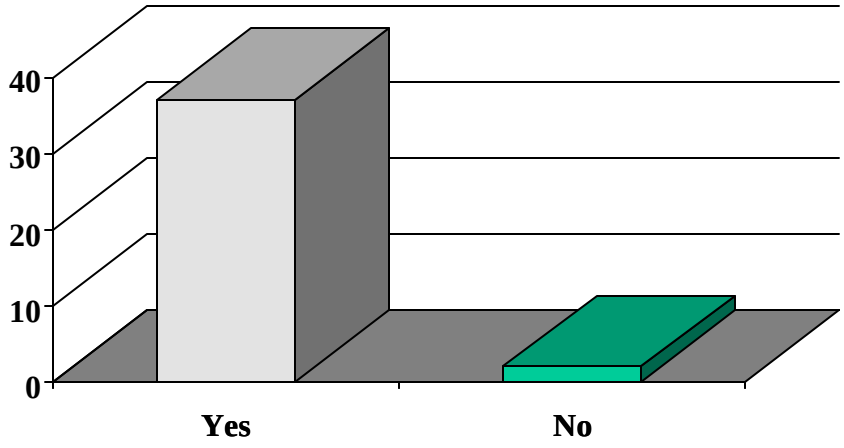
7. If you have been mentored, how would you categorize the amount of influence it has had on your career?

Major influence	8	=	21%
Substantial influence	21	=	55%
Minimal influence	8	=	21%
No influence	1	=	3%



8. Would you be willing to mentor another fire officer?

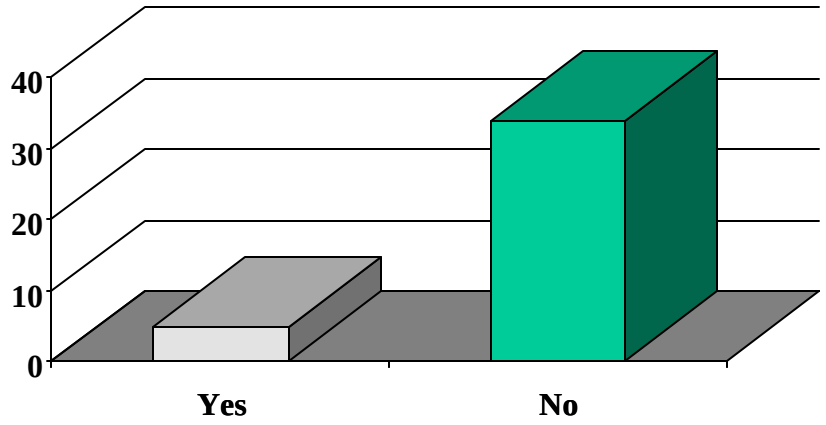
Yes	37	=	95%
No	2	=	5%



9. Have you been trained in mentorship?

Yes	5	=	13%

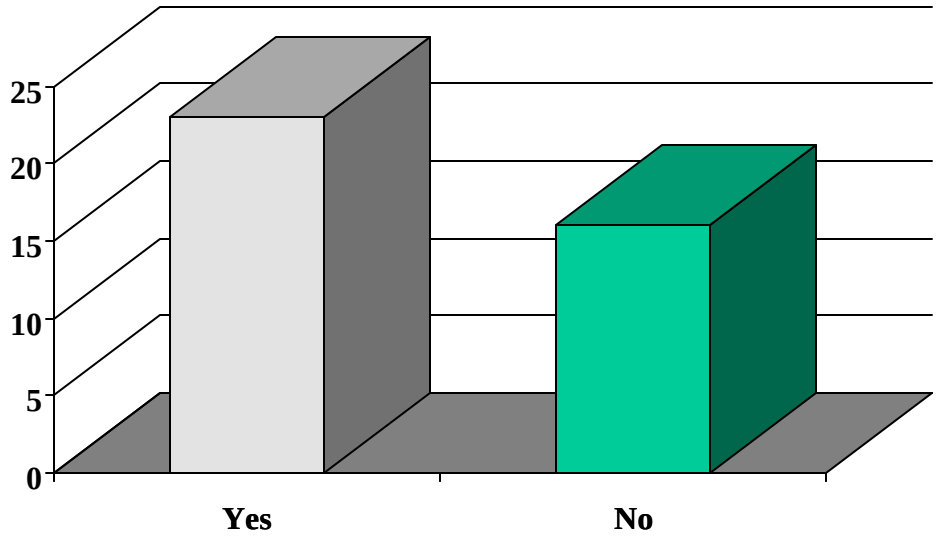
No 34 = 87%



10. Have you studied mentorship on your own?

Yes 23 = 59%

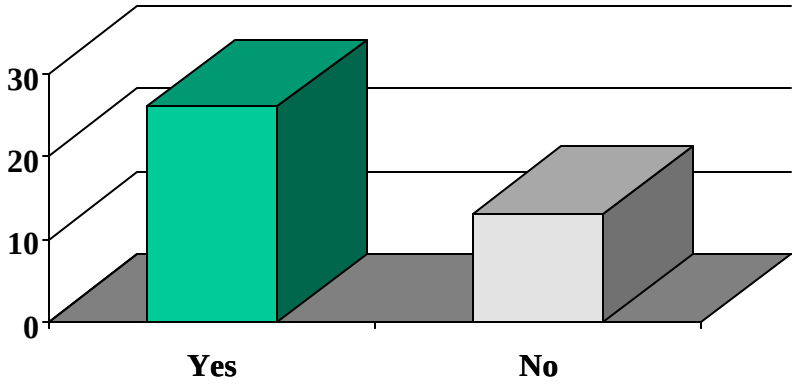
No 16 = 41%



11. Would you like to be trained to mentor and be mentored more effectively?

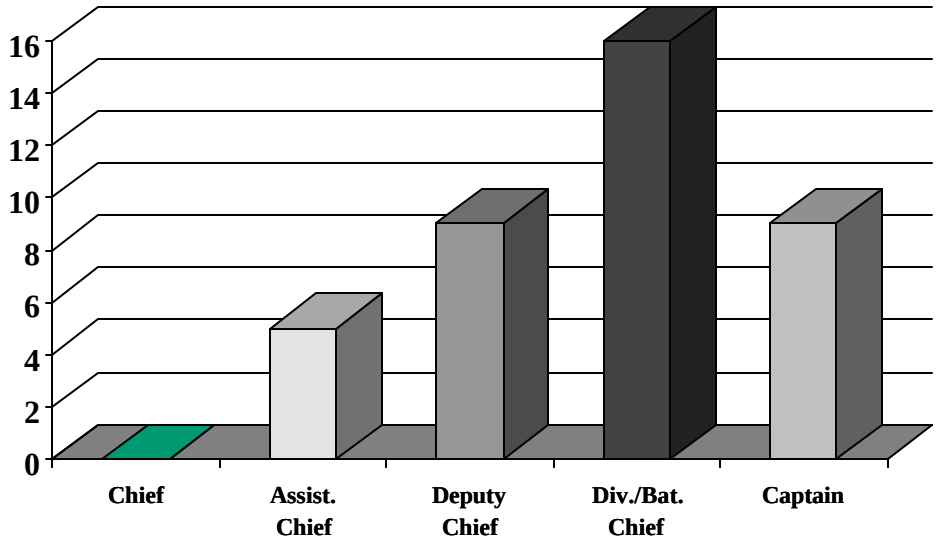
Yes 26 = 67%

No 13 = 33%



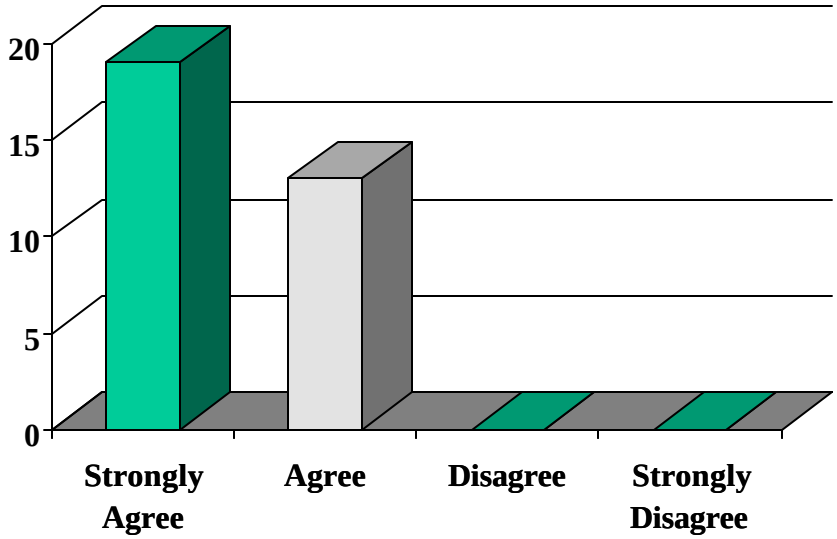
12. Please indicate your rank.

Chief	0	
Assistant Chief	5	= 13%
Deputy Chief	9	= 23%
Battalion/Division Chief	16	= 41%
Captain on current list	9	= 23%



13. The mentoring of fire officers hold unrealized potential for developing leadership abilities.

Strongly agree	23	= 59%
Agree	16	= 41%
Disagree	0	
Strongly disagree	0	



Note: The respondents have 557 cumulative years of experience as fire officers. This represents a considerable amount of experience leading the fire service.

Results of Interviews

The critical components of successful mentor relationships between fire officers in the Phoenix Fire Department as identified by those fire officers include genuine interest in the well-being of the mentee, trust, the ability to ask "stupid questions" and a significant mutual commitment to the relationship. Other critical components include, ability and willingness to actively listen to the other partner, strong communication skills and willingness of the mentor to be a role model.

Usually, the relationship began subtly, with the mentee almost unconsciously mirroring behaviors of the role model. These relationships evolved into mentor

relationships when the mentee approached the prospective mentor and asked for help with an issue. Another common beginning was the boss subordinate relationship, which evolved into mentoring as the investment in the relationship grew with time and effort. This served as the foundation for continued mentoring in some cases, long after the partners had transferred away. Some of the most successful relationships began as peer mentors, colleagues or friends. As peers, the partners face similar problems and situations and stand to gain equally from the relationship. Occasionally, the relationships began after the mentor chose the mentee based on accomplishments.

Several of the command officers interviewed expressed personal doubts about formal mentorship programs. One senior officer claimed that according to his definition of mentoring, formal mentoring is not possible. He stated that if the organization gets involved, it becomes career development, not mentoring. He asserted that mentorship is personal, nurturing, private; bordering on intimate and sacred. Others based their doubts on the previously assigned, but unsupported mentoring effort.

While few of the mentors reported standing appointments with the mentees, the use of E-mail and telephone contact was common. The mentors reported that it was essential to make time for the mentees when they requested it. The mentees must be comfortable enough to initiate contact as needed and realize that their well being is important to the mentor.

None of those interviewed had ever been refused help from a prospective mentor in the fire service. None had ever refused to help a mentee when they were called upon. It was common, however, for the unsupported mentor/mentee assignments

referred to earlier, to fail to develop into relationships due to a lack of commitment of both parties.

The tendency to select a mentee or mentor with similar strengths, perspectives and desires must be resisted if the relationship is going to have maximum benefit. The potential for discovery is heightened by the challenge of relating with someone of diverse viewpoints and dissimilar background. Another possibility is group mentoring which maximizes the benefit of the mentor time and effort invested. It is reportedly functional to use two mentors and up to ten mentees per meeting. Recently several command officers have instituted monthly meetings with all candidates for the upcoming captain promotional process as well as the battalion chief promotional process. While this may not fit the classical framework of mentoring, there appear to be many similar benefits for the participants and the organization.

DISCUSSION

The value of mentor relationships in the Phoenix Fire Department appears to be increasing as these officers have mentored more than they have been mentored. Compare the responses in question 1 to the responses to question 2. This may represent a national trend in the fire service or it could be a reflection of the informal mentoring process that has been encouraged within the Phoenix Fire Department.

Currently, 77% of the officers are mentoring other officers. This compares favorably to Austin's 1997 study of mentorship among National Fire Academy students

(command officers). He found that 54% were currently mentoring someone else. The fact that over three quarters of the fire officers are involved in mentoring other fire officers represents a significant personal commitment to the mentoring process.

Of the 77% of Phoenix command officers, currently mentoring another officer, 78% find the relationship fulfilling or very fulfilling. This is one measure of the success and rewards that mentors gain from the relationships.

Only 44% of the officers are currently being mentored. This is very close to the 47% that John Austin reports of his respondents currently being mentored. The number of respondents being mentored is only 57% of the number mentoring other fire officers. Due to their high-ranking positions in the organization, it is logical that more of them would serve as mentor than mentee.

These officers hold mentoring as a worthwhile endeavor. 24% report the relationship is always worthwhile, 62% claim it is usually worthwhile and only 14% claim the relationship is sometimes worthwhile. This is another positive indicator that mentoring is meeting many of the needs of the officers involved.

As a measure of influence on their career, 21% ranked mentoring a major career influence, while 55% ranked it as a substantial influence. This author finds the figure of 76% of the officers reporting mentoring as a substantial to major career influence amazing in light of the fact that the Phoenix Fire Department has not had a formal mentoring program to this point. However, Meston (p.14) found similar percentages in his study of mentorship among California fire chiefs. He reported that

28% stated mentoring had been an extraordinary influence on their careers and 56% reported it as a substantial influence on their careers.

A full 95% of the officers stated they would be willing to mentor another fire officer. This indicates the willingness of the fire officer to help others in spite of the often hectic work schedule demanded today. It is also indicator that mentoring is valued as a worthwhile endeavor. This finding concurs with the findings of Austin (p.16), who had 97% of his fire officer respondents express a willingness to mentor another member.

A lack of training in mentoring is obvious as 87% of the respondents admitted they had not been trained. However, 59% have studied it on their own. This indicates the majority of the officers realized the value of mentoring enough to pursue it on their own, although it has been largely unsupported by the organization.

This author was pleasantly surprised by the widespread support for training in mentorship as reflected by the 67% of the officers who want to be trained to mentor and be mentored more effectively. Fire command officers in Phoenix attend a considerable amount of training, both on and off duty. The emphasis of training for fire officers in Phoenix largely revolves around command of emergency incidents. Mentorship represents the softer side of leadership which has not traditionally been highlighted in fire officer training.

A full 59% of the respondents strongly agreed that mentoring fire officers holds unrealized potential for developing leadership abilities, while the other 41% agreed with the statement. 100% of the respondents felt that mentoring holds unrealized potential

for developing leadership abilities. Again, this represents very strong support for further development of a mentor program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the consensus that the mentoring of fire officers holds unrealized potential for developing leadership abilities, mentoring should be pursued in some format. This support for mentorship is further reinforced by the 95% of the officers that expressed a willingness to mentor another fire officer.

A formal mentorship/career development program offers several advantages. First, the results are quantifiable. Satisfaction, progress and development can be measured. Measurement is critical to justification of expenditure in this age of fiscal responsibility. Second, it is easier to provide support for a formal program. For example, training, skill development, education, mediation, pairing interested parties, a reward system, and tracking development of members are far easier with a formal program. Third, a formal program is reproducible. Such a program could easily serve as a fire service model for officer development, thereby serving the fire service at large instead of only the Phoenix Fire Department.

There are also disadvantages of a formal mentorship program. According to several studies, more support is required when the organization takes responsibility for facilitating this effort. Support including time, effort, funding for training, education and

redesign of the reward system is reportedly critical to long term success of a formal mentorship program.

The responsibility for management of a mentorship program would logically rest with the division of Personnel Services. Based on my six-year's experience in that division, this additional responsibility would require the placement of another command officer in that area. Considering the political realities currently faced by the Phoenix Fire Department, the chances of gaining another command officer position in that division, seem remote.

Therefore, I would not recommend a formal mentorship program unless the level of support necessary for long term success could be garnered. This level of support would require buy in throughout the ranks of fire management as well as city management. In consideration of the required components to successfully support a formal mentorship program, a determination of support for the concept should be made. If the necessary support can be garnered, I recommend that a formal mentorship program be instituted. Several excellent books with information on how to set up a formal mentorship program are listed in the reference section of this paper.

In contrast, if the necessary support cannot be gathered for a formal mentorship program, I recommend voluntary education and training to enhance the fire officers' abilities to maximize development from their informal mentorship efforts. These classes should be opened to any fire officer and eventually to every fire officer candidate. The survey results reflected 67% of fire officers desired training in mentoring.

These mentorship classes should be designed with the adult learner in mind. Important skills should be identified, practiced and reinforced through role-plays, case studies, group discussion and small group exercises in a safe and interactive environment. Prospective mentors and mentees should be provided the opportunity to interact, pair off, and clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations. Guidelines should be provided for further reference.

In either case, whether a formal mentorhsip program is instituted or training and education on the mentor process is provided, mentorship should be encouraged. However, no one should be coerced to participate in the mentoring process or training. This will prove ineffective and damaging to the effort of leadership development.

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APPENDIX

Survey of Mentor Experiences of Fire Officers

1. Since becoming an officer, have you been mentored* by:

   - 7 or more mentors
   - 5 - 6 mentors
   - 3 - 4 mentors
   - 0 - 2 mentors

2. Since becoming an officer, have you mentored:

   - 7 or more officers
   - 5 - 6 officers
   - 3 - 4 officers
   - 0 - 2 officers

3. Are you currently mentoring another fire officer

   - Yes
   - No

4. If you are currently mentoring another fire officer, how rewarding do you find the relationship?

   - Very fulfilling
   - Fulfilling
   - Somewhat fulfilling
   - Waste of time

5. Are you currently being mentored by a fire officer?

   - Yes
   - No

* Mentor relationship is developed to transfer skill and knowledge, “sponsoring” a more junior person, and acting as a “model” of effective behavior.

6. If you are currently being mentored, does the relationship meet your needs?

- Always worthwhile
- Usually worthwhile
- Sometimes worthwhile
- Infrequently or never worthwhile

7. If you have been mentored, how would you categorize the amount of influence it has had on your career?

- Major
- Substantial
- Minimal
- None

8. Would you be willing to mentor another fire officer?

- Yes
- No

9. Have you been trained in mentorship?

- Yes
- No

10. Have you studied mentorship on your own?

- Yes
- No

11. Would you like to be trained to mentor and be mentored more effectively?

- Yes
- No

12. Please write your rank and number of years since becoming a fire officer/captain.

- Fire Chief
- Deputy Chief
- Captain
- Assistant Chief
- Division/Battalion Chief

Number of years since becoming a Captain _____

13. The mentoring of fire officers holds unrealized potential for developing leadership abilities:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. If you are willing to do a follow-up interview (half hour) about your experiences in mentor relationships, please write your name and number in the space below.

Name_____ #_____